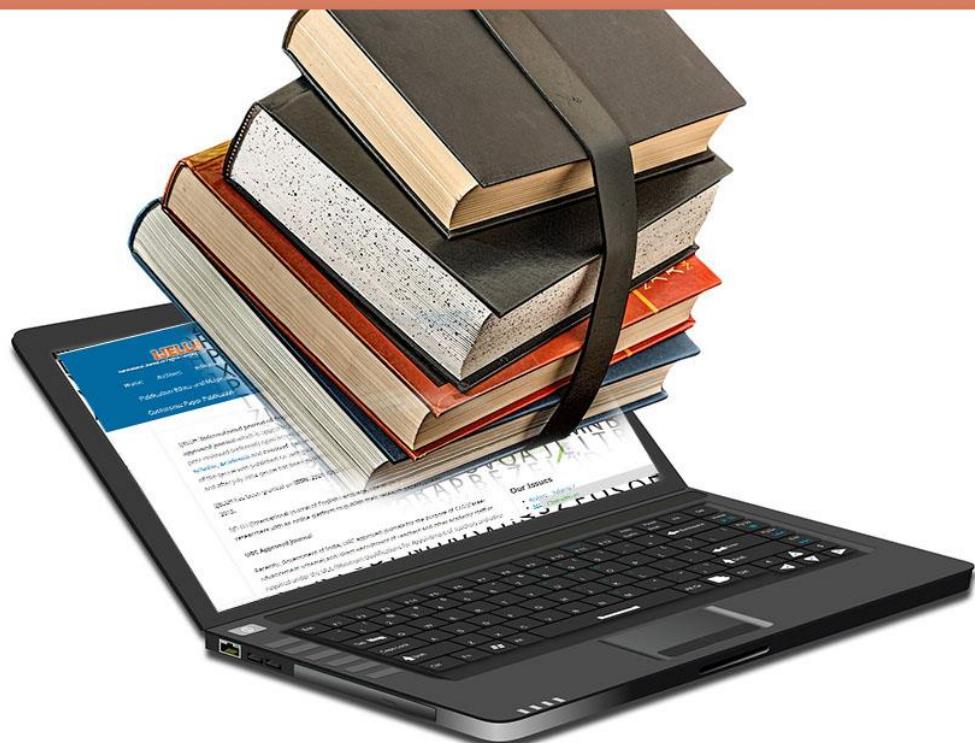


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Self revelation and the Social Environment in the works of Ruskin Bond

Abstract

Ruskin Bond's works serve as the tool to identify the writer's personal self. The paper focuses on the autobiographical elements in the works of Ruskin Bond. More than the content, the narrative style is autobiographical bringing the authenticity to the texts. The study of Bond's texts help the readers to trace the writer's real self through the portrayal of characters in his short stories. The honest writing of his original autobiography facilitates the readers to understand his text. The optimistic approach of Bond towards his hardships in life is the highlight of the writer's fictional world. Though the themes are fictional, the root of his writing is only from his premature adulthood experience and sufferings during his childhood days.

Keywords: Autobiography, childhood sufferings, loneliness, environment, optimism etc...

“..we don’t become writers in schools of creative writing .We become writers before we learn to write. The rest is simply learning how to put it all together”

--- Ruskin Bond

Ruskin Bond is a gifted writer of double identification as British and Indian .He was called as Indian Charles Lamb for his personal tone in his writing for children in India.

Autobiography turns to be a style of narration for Bond’s stories for adults, young adults and children. The original autobiography ‘Scenes from a Writer’s Life’ is a poignant portrayal of his life which serves as a glossary to understand his semi fictional works. It facilitates the readers to study the writer’s self in almost all his fictional characters. His long association with the Indian soil becomes the atmosphere of his writing irrespective of the themes. The description of the world by the author is what he has seen through the window if his cottage.

The subject of his stories is from his own memory coloured with imagination. He is the most loved writer of the children literature in Indian for his authenticity in his writing. The logical and convincing style of writing can be attained only with the real felt emotions of the incidents. His love for writing and reading books are a sort of escape from his loneliness after his father’s death. His unfulfilled desires are given shape as stories for children. Since his childhood days were not an ordinary normal phase, he attains the philosophical level of understanding life in a very early age of adolescence.

He confirms the above statement by writing in his autobiography *Scenes from a writer’s life* as ”I don’t suppose I would have written so much about childhood or even about other children, if my own childhood had been all happiness and Light.”(Bond Ruskin, 04)

Bond’s stories are rooted with his reactions on the happenings around him. His home stay in Dehra lends setting to his stories. The people and the landscape got its meaning in the way it is depicted with human feelings. The characters are real life like in the stories since they were the real people whom he met in one or the other occasion. He writes it in the

introduction to his book '*Friends in Small Places*' as "I have been writing stories of one kind or another for nearly fifty years and, along the way, it has always been the people I've known and met who have given these stories." (vii)

Ruskin Bond's attitude towards the handling of his emotions is tremendous. He mastered his miseries and took shelter under the shadow of the nature and occupied in writing. He feels liberated from the earthly agony through his creations of stories. The impossible is made possible in his stories. The reality and the fantasy go hand in hand in his arrangement of incidents as stories. The theme of loneliness, love for the other creatures and nature are more than his love for human beings. He is rightly called as Indian Charles Lamp for his wishes that runs through the veins of his imaginary stories. His wish to have a family is revealed through the story 'On Fairy Hill'. There is a confusing portrayal of the characters can be felt by the readers.

Ruskin Bond's wish to have a family is the dream of the writer that has taken the shape of a story but his childhood trauma caused by his mother's betrayal gave him an idea that no women live with their poor husband. He writes as "It was a lonely period in my life. My marriage hadn't worked out: my wife, fond of high society and averse to living with an unsuccessful writer in a remote cottage in the woods, was pursuing her own career in Mumbai.....She had always wanted more and more of it. She left me-left me with my books and my dreams.(Bond Ruskin ,1999.p.28-29)

His stories have either children as protagonist or the non human. The impact of his mother's betrayal can be traced in many of his writings. Without his knowledge the anger and disagreement of his parent's marriage is let out in his lines of his autobiography. The impact of his childhood trauma continues to reflect in his life and in turn in his works. The trust upon the marriage bonding is lost within him. But fortunately the people he met in India and the culture he got exposed to retain his hope on the family bonding and the true love of some

people gave the hope for the writer to lead his life with his adopted family. He writes about his parent's meaningless married life as "They were obviously incompatible. They should never have married, I suppose. In which case, of course, I would not here, penning these memoirs."(24)

It is very difficult for the readers to separate autobiography from fiction in the works of Ruskin Bond. His stories are realistic in narration since it is the real feelings of the author. His Stories are upon his life in the hills Owen with the people around it. So his stories are inseparable from the depiction of lively mountains in his stories. His earlier perfect autobiography 'Scenes from a Writer's Life' is about his growing phase and the struggles during his childhood days. But after started writing in his adolescence, he again becomes a child and wishes to live the life of a child as a whole mentally which he has lost. He fulfills his desire by writing stories for children.

The narrator of Ruskin bond stories are the author himself. This idea stays in the minds of the young readers without a second thought due to the personalized narrative style. Bond did not attempt to write which he is not aware of. The stories are his own feelings and understanding .even the fictitious part is nothing but his longings which was given life and form through his writings. The inner self of the author takes up the shape of the stories. The craving of the author gets into the writing. He writes in the introduction of his work '*the lamp is lit*' as "The essays and journal entries presented....are factual and, to some extent, revealing,(x)

Bond is a simple, honest and caring grandfather of the Indian children. He is an interesting story teller of the Indian life on hills. His love for nature, Indian culture and its people become the subject of his stories. His stories for children are his voice of his inner childhood agony. He believes to be the son of the Indian soil. The optimistic writing too is gained through his association with the Indian culture and customs.

The retelling of the myth is found in his stories to reveal his closeness with the Indian nation and his knowledge upon the Indian puranas and legends. The myth plays an important role in revealing his real dominating self out of his double identification. India is not just a social environment for his stories but it is the atmosphere for his writing. The Indianess is bond's narrative style for his young readers. The Indian ethos unconsciously imbibed in the writer's language.

Mulk Raj Anand acknowledges the Indianess of Bond's writing in one of his letter to him as "as you are the youngest of the British writers, and have matured after India became free, you have no sense of superiority over the Indians around you. So your novels and stories seem to have emerged from within Indian homes" (Anand ,Mulk Raj,1995,p.34)

Ruskin Bond's love for his dead father is a scar in his heart which gets a touch of longing for it in many of his stories. He leaves his thought of writing about the sorrows in one's life as "I was hoping that there was still room in this world for a simple story teller, one who strives to give pleasure to both child and adult, not by hiding our scars but by showing that we can be beautiful inspite of them.(the lamp is lit,xi)

'The Funeral' is a pathetic story of his father's death when he was just ten years old. This story brings tears into most of the readers. According to him, his father has vanished since he did not witness his father's death. This was a boon for him to continue living with the strong faith that his father would return one day. But he imagines the scene of witnessing his father's funeral and writes the story 'The Funeral'. His most of the stories are the materialistic verbal construction of the non verbal emotions.

'The Funeral' is a documentation of the author's untold agony of his father's death news. He was just told about the death of his father but not given a chance to witness his father's funeral. As a writer Bond gives a verbal construction to his painful emotions that he felt when he heard about his father's death. Though the whole story 'The Funeral' is a

imaginary story, the expressed bundle of emotions in it is real. It was the tears of the author towards the trauma of his real life. Bond is introduced to the world of books by his father and the father's habit of planting trees made a big impact in bond's real life and also in his writing profession. He was taught by his father as "The strongest man in the world is he who stands alone."(The Best of Ruskin Bond, 80)

Ruskin Bond's choice to be a writer is a way to escape from the terrible loneliness. He speaks to his readers through his writing .His choice of subject to his stories are more genuine to burst out his frustrations gained from the disasters of his life during his childhood days. He reveals his overcoming of the loneliness in the lines of 'The Funeral ' as "He'll find a way out,' the boy said fiercely to himself.'He'll get out somehow!'"(80)

Bond saw the entire world through his window. He writes in the story 'The Window 'as "The Window is the screen, the world is the Picture."(Thick As Thieves,129) the natural scenes seen through the window becomes his subject for most of his stories. He understood life by seeing it in his loneliness. Since his residence is among the hills and lives in it, his characters are all whom he met in the hills. The characters are both human and non human. He calls the small creatures that enter his room through his window as visitors. He proves to be a good observer of his environment. He adds his wishes too to his real character to look like a fictitious one. His unbiased portrayal of the non human characters is more effective and popular among both children and adult readers.

The beastly characters posses the human touch in Bond's stories. They are named and gifted with the ability to converse with the human beings. It is the eco conscious author's experimentation to make the readers hear the cry of the animals and plants due to their unfriendly behavior towards the nature. His love for everything around him and the optimistic view of life due to the love for his self is revealed in his works."Human beings have always

brought harm to our race” says an elephant character in the story, ‘The White Elephant’(A Bond with Nature,179)

Bond’s bonding with all creatures on earth from tiny to large in his environment helps him to get rid of the loneliness as an old bachelor”.....trees gave me a feeling of security, as well as privacy and a calm haven.(Scenes from a writer’s life,35).He always loves to take the unused path of the jungle as Robert Frost writes in his poem ‘Road Not Taken’. He prefers the wilderness than bringing order with the natural plants. He is more honest in writing about people but writes as an optimistic writer. He writes in the introduction of his book ‘*Friends in Small Places*’ as “ ..it has always been the people I’ve known and met who have given me these stories-friends, lovers, relatives, chance acquaintances, strangers, or other people’s friends and relatives”.(vii)

Ruskin Bond gives life to his desires of life in the form of stories. The stories are his self yearnings for the lost worldly blessings on earth. As Thomas Moore writes ‘Utopia’, Bond writes his imaginary world of his wishes. His lost childhood happiness is received by him through his skill of creativity. In the list of such creations come the portrayal of loving grandmothers and grandfathers in his stories. In his real life he never enjoyed the warmth of any such grandparent’s affection. He was a neglected grandchild in reality. So he gives life to his unfulfilled longings to have loving grandparents in his stories. The lines in his “*Scenes from a Writer’s Life*’ proves the above statement from the understanding of his works. It runs as “In some of my children’s stories I have written about loving grandfathers and doting grandmothers, but this was just wishful thinking on my part.”(34)

Ruskin Bond’s writing becomes the tool for him to express his inner self in the form of imaginary stories for young readers. His stories are written based on his childhood trauma. The lost young days are regained by the writer through his stories for children. The sufferings and loneliness of his past enables him to feel child at heart to write for young

readers. To return to the early age is a challenge for any writer of the children, but it happened to Bond naturally due to his love for everything around him, no matter whether it is human or non human. He expresses his optimistic self along with the depiction of his environment through the semi autobiographical stories. The Indian self of the writer is felt in every word of his stories. His narration is more subjective that webs around his exploration of his small world.

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